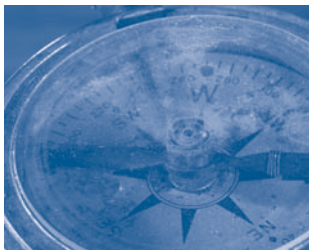




# Supervision and Intervention within Early Intervention Systems:

*A Guide for Law Enforcement Chief Executives*



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POLICE EXECUTIVE  
RESEARCH FORUM



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*A Guide for Law Enforcement Chief Executives*

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The opinions expressed are generally those based on the consensus of participants in interviews, site visits, or expert panel meetings. However, not every view or statement presented in this report can necessarily be attributed to each individual participant.

Websites and sources listed provide useful information at the time of this writing, but the authors do not endorse any information of the sponsor organization or other information on the websites.

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EIS  
GUIDE



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In addition to the site visits, PERF convened an exceptional group of individuals from both the law enforcement community and the private sector who have expertise in EIS and/or supervision and leadership. This group of very busy individuals graciously agreed to spend one day discussing how law enforcement agencies could improve supervision within the context of an early intervention system. This discussion later became the basis for some of the recommendations included in this guide. For their participation and thoughtful insight, we would like to thank Commander Linda Barone (Pittsburgh Bureau of Police), Lieutenant Tim Canas (Arlington, Tex., Police Department), Michael Cortrite (UCLA), Captain Joan Dias (Tampa Police Department), Mollie Haines (Vice President, D.C. Chamber of Commerce), Assistant Sheriff Rod Jett (Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department), Gail Kettlewell (George Mason University), Lynn Leavitt (George Mason University), Chief Ken McGuire (West Jordan, Utah, Police Department), John Markovic (International



Association of Chiefs of Police), Chief Robert McNeilly (Pittsburgh Bureau of Police), Commander Catherine McNeilly (Pittsburgh Bureau of Police), Chief Bill McSweeney (Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department), Toye Nash (Phoenix Police Department), Lieutenant Larry Oliver (Austin, Tex., Police Department), Sergeant Mike Schaller (New Jersey State Police), and Deputy Superintendent Ellen Scrivner (Chicago Police Department).

At the start of this project, PERF staff contacted a great many law enforcement agencies to learn from their experiences. Based on the results, PERF staff identified a smaller number of agencies that appeared to have significant success. Staff also conducted telephone interviews with more than 30 law enforcement agencies. We thank them immensely for their time and candor. A full listing of these agencies may be found in Appendix B.

A team of PERF staff and expert consultants deserve special recognition for their hard work. We thank Lorie Fridell for her incredible insight and overall support of this project, and Josh Ederheimer for all of his efforts to keep the project on time and on budget. We also thank Anna Berke for helping this project run smoothly. She truly went above and beyond what was asked of her and did so with great professionalism. We thank Camille Preston and Alison Kendall for their assistance on site visits, and Jason Cheney for his superb management of the telephone interviews. We also thank Martha Plotkin for her assistance in helping to move this guide toward publication. Thank you as well to Nathan Ballard for his overall support and his never-ending enthusiasm to provide assistance on projects.



## Foreword

The vast majority of this country's law enforcement officers are principled men and women who provide professional service to the communities they serve. Their responsibilities are great, and the expectations from their communities are high. Unfortunately, there are times when officers' performance falls short of agency expectations for any number of reasons. In these circumstances, agencies have traditionally responded to such officers through disciplinary means—hoping that any inappropriate behavior will end. We now know, however, that there are a variety of ways to solve these issues, and in some cases we have the ability to do so before a problem even manifests itself in inappropriate behaviors on the job. Agencies are adopting early intervention systems that are successfully achieving this goal.

Although these systems have been used by some agencies for more than 25 years, the recent evolution of EIS is having increased success in addressing and preventing personnel issues. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two key components of effective systems are well-trained supervisors (especially first-line supervisors) and the availability of a broad range of “interventions” to help address the difficulties facing officers on the street. Indeed, the work that formed the basis for this guide revealed that some law enforcement agencies are making dramatic reforms in the way they handle officer performance problems, beginning with the quality of the interactions between supervisors and officers and the resources they provide to help agency personnel. While the breadth and depth of these changes vary by agency culture, size, and jurisdiction, the authors of this study found that agencies reorienting themselves to “helping” officers instead of only disciplining them will go far in improving accountability, integrity, and the overall health of the organization.

Recommendations are provided throughout this guide to help agencies improve supervision and expand intervention options within EIS. Additional guidance is provided on how to plan for, develop, implement, and maintain such a system. This is new information that emerged during the course of this study and is critical for the chief executive who is either planning to implement or revise an early intervention system.



We plan to release a companion to this guide specifically written for the first-line supervisor. While providing guidance and recommendations on EIS, it will focus on supervisors' roles and responsibilities as they relate to identifying, intervening, and following up with officers who are exhibiting problem behaviors.

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Police Executive Research Forum are pleased to bring these recommendations to the field to ensure the well-being of our nation's officers and to bring the best possible police services to all communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carl R. Peed". The signature is stylized, with the first and last names being more prominent than the middle initial.

Carl R. Peed  
Director, COPS

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Wexler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chuck Wexler  
Executive Director, PERF



# INTRODUCTION





# INTRODUCTION

The law enforcement officers who serve our communities are given great responsibility, are asked to face significant dangers, and are expected to conduct themselves in an ethical and respectful manner. Every day the vast majority of law enforcement officers fulfill these duties with the utmost professionalism and dedication. Yet, experience has shown that there are a small number of officers who unfortunately engage in behaviors detrimental to the community, the department, or themselves. Law enforcement agencies strive to identify these officers at the earliest opportunity to avoid potentially dangerous or harmful behaviors in the future.

Early intervention systems (EIS) are a tool being adopted at an increasing rate by law enforcement agencies of all sizes and types. These systems are usually in the form of an electronic database, although some agencies find paper files are effective. The “system” captures specific pieces of information about officer behavior to help identify problematic behaviors early on. Some of the more common data elements collected by EIS include an officer’s use of sick leave; the number and type of community complaints; and the number and type of use-of-force incidents. Although many agencies collect the same type of data, the overall purpose of their systems can be quite different. For example, some agencies implement EIS to help identify officers who may be experiencing personal or professional problems that are manifesting themselves in unacceptable performance on the job. These agencies may use system information to help target resources to the specific needs of an officer. These types of systems generally focus on helping officers and providing intervention in a non-punitive and non-disciplinary fashion. Other agencies adopt an early intervention system to help manage personnel—using the data for performance evaluations, assignment decisions, and improvements in accountability among officers and supervisors. Still other departments implement EIS for more pragmatic reasons, such as identifying officer performance problems early on so as to avoid future inappropriate conduct, complaints, or even lawsuits. Regardless of the reasons for implementation, EIS can be a powerful, multifaceted tool for law enforcement agencies.



<sup>1</sup> The threshold is the point at which a sufficient number of incidents have occurred to warrant a formal inquiry into the behaviors of an officer.

<sup>2</sup> In a study conducted for the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, Walker (2003) found that in particular the supervision and intervention components of EIS require further research.

EIS have been used in the law enforcement community for more than 25 years, yet research to date on EIS has focused almost exclusively on what may be termed the “front end” components of an early intervention system—primarily, what types of data should be collected and how thresholds<sup>1</sup> should be set. There has been very little formal inquiry into what actually happens in a law enforcement agency once an officer reaches a threshold within an early intervention system.

To learn more about how agencies are effectively handling instances where officers have reached a threshold, this study examined two key components in this stage of early intervention: the role of the first-line supervisor and the intervention process, particularly regarding follow-up once an officer has reached a threshold.<sup>2</sup> This guide addresses these issues and provides practical recommendations for law enforcement agencies and chief executives.

The information presented here is based on a study conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) in partnership with University of Nebraska-Omaha Professor Sam Walker, a noted scholar in the area of early intervention systems, and was funded with the generous support of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). It examined how law enforcement agencies that are leading the field in successful early intervention systems handle the issues surrounding supervision and intervention, and how they innovatively tackle the challenges they face. During the course of this study, the PERF project team also learned more about how agencies are dealing with many other aspects of EIS—for example, planning for a system, getting buy-in, and training. While not the primary focus of the study, these latter issues can be instrumental in helping decision makers identify the best approach for their own agency’s early intervention system, whether for a new system or an existing system that needs some fine-tuning. The information presented in this guide thus augments the findings on supervision and intervention.

The primary audience for this guide is law enforcement chief executives because much of the information concerns their perspectives and roles as they relate to successful supervision and intervention within an early intervention system as well as their involvement in the planning, development, and maintenance of these systems. This guide is also relevant for those responsible for making executive-level decisions about EIS, including command staff and those who have day-to-day responsibility for the operations of an agency's system. A second guide accompanying this one is aimed at first-line supervisors and midlevel managers.<sup>3</sup> That guide highlights their roles and responsibilities within an early intervention system, and provides recommendations to help them effectively handle system-related matters with an emphasis on intervention.

## About This Guide

This publication is designed to provide practical advice on many aspects of EIS, including defining the role of the first-line supervisor, structuring the intervention process for officers who have reached (or are about to reach) a threshold within the system, identifying ways to provide the various programs and services that supplement and reinforce EIS, and creating a broader culture of accountability in law enforcement agencies. In addition, it presents some key recommendations for developing, implementing, and maintaining EIS, based on the lessons learned from other law enforcement agencies.

Practical experience with EIS provides the basis for this guide. The PERF project team initially contacted approximately 50 small, medium, and large law enforcement agencies known to have well-functioning EIS and asked them to participate in interviews about their systems.<sup>4</sup> Through these interviews the team identified nine agencies to examine more closely for their approaches to supervision and/or intervention.<sup>5</sup> These sites (listed in Table 1 on the next page) include various types of agencies that have adopted successful EIS, including several small, medium, and large agencies; a sheriff's department; and agencies from different parts of the country. One of the purposes for choosing a relatively diverse group of sites was to explore how law enforcement

<sup>3</sup> The second guide is forthcoming and may be found on the PERF website ([www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org)) and on the COPS website ([www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)).

<sup>4</sup> We identified these agencies by reviewing relevant literature (both academic and practitioner-focused), and using a snowball sampling technique whereby practitioners and others with expertise in EIS identified agencies that they felt had exceptional systems.

<sup>5</sup> The agencies chosen for site visits are examples of the different types of EIS adopted by law enforcement agencies. These examples are meant to characterize the range of systems in existence with a particular focus on strengthening supervision and/or intervention.



agencies differed in their approaches to EIS depending on their size, jurisdiction, and geographic location (e.g., how first-line supervisors are incorporated into the early intervention system process, how agencies handle officers who have reached a threshold, and how agencies navigate the intervention process). Project team members visited these sites and interviewed personnel from all ranks of the department, including the chief executive and a number of non-sworn personnel.

**Table 1: List of Agencies Participating in Site Visits**

Agency	State	Number Sworn
Los Angeles Sheriff's Department	California	8,500
Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department	Nevada	2,353
San Jose Police Department	California	1,400
Pittsburgh Bureau of Police	Pennsylvania	1,100
Tampa Police Department	Florida	1,002
Prince William County Police Department	Virginia	493
Clearwater Police Department	Florida	264
Pocatello Police Department	Idaho	86
West Jordan Police Department	Utah	80

Finally, for this study the PERF team also convened a one-day panel comprised of law enforcement practitioners with expertise in EIS and private-sector experts in leadership and supervision. The members of the expert panel discussed innovative ways to train, engage, and hold accountable law enforcement supervisors who work within the structure of EIS.



The project team learned a great deal from the interviews, site visits, and expert panel, including a number of best practices that other agencies can adopt as well as how agencies handled some initial obstacles and some unexpected problems that they encountered. The most important lesson learned from this study is the crucial element of leadership from the chief executive. Study findings indicated that a large reason for the success of EIS was the police chief or the sheriff who advocated for and supported the system within the agency. These types of leaders helped move their early intervention system into a functioning reality. As one participant in the expert panel observed, leadership from the top is imperative.

## Guiding Principles

This guide is based on five basic principles. The first is that EIS should be part of an agency's larger effort to support and improve officer performance. In the past, EIS were typically referred to as early "warning" systems, implying a focus on problems and discipline. Because of this perception, many law enforcement personnel and union representatives have been skeptical of EIS, making buy-in difficult. These systems, however, function most effectively when they are used to help identify and address problems before officers get into serious trouble (e.g., before formal complaints or lawsuits arise and before an officer's well-being is compromised). The key is to view (and promote) the system as a nondisciplinary component of an agency's personnel management toolbox. That is not to say that discipline is replaced by intervention. Instead, discipline should be viewed as a separate component within the agency's toolbox. EIS can be viewed even more broadly and used to reward positive police behavior. The Clearwater Police Department presents their early intervention system as a self-help program, involving data collection, recommendations, and referrals, but not discipline.

The second guiding principle is that first-line supervisors are really the lynchpin of EIS. In most cases, they are the first to observe potentially problematic behavior among their officers and are typically involved in the intervention process once an officer has reached an early intervention system threshold. Filling such a vital



role within EIS requires that first-line supervisors be prepared to handle responsibilities they may not have previously considered part of their job (i.e., analyzing system data, formally engaging officers about potential personal and professional problems that may be affecting their work, and assessing and pairing intervention options with officers' needs).

The third principle is that for EIS to be effective, intervention options should vary to meet the wide range of officers' needs. By providing some flexibility in the types of intervention options, an agency can increase the likelihood of improving officer performance. That is, the more targeted or specialized an intervention, the better the chances of helping the officer achieve needed improvements.

The fourth principle is that the chief executive ultimately is responsible for the operations of their law enforcement agency. The executive is responsible for the quality of services delivered to the public and for maintaining high standards of integrity. The success or failure of EIS, therefore, depends primarily on the chief executive's leadership.

The fifth and final principle is that EIS are a valuable administrative tool that can enhance accountability and integrity in a law enforcement agency. They can identify officer performance problems and provide the means for correcting them. They can enhance the quality of routine supervision throughout the agency and reduce problematic incidents such as officer-involved shootings, use of less lethal force, and other problems. EIS can reduce costs arising from civil litigation and improve relations with the community. And they can help improve the well-being of officers and their families.